

Slipcase by Andreu Ginestet

**Slip 11:**

Title:

**Communication Skills:**

**Why the Military Picked an Artist as a  
Peace Mediator: A Reflection on  
Communication, Complexity, and the  
Narrowing Window for Decision**

## Abstract

This reflective essay addresses a question that has puzzled the author for years: why did military and NATO structures select him –an artist– as a peace mediator in high-stakes conflict scenarios? A recent article by Sarah Cordivano on leadership communication provides a clarifying framework. Cordivano identifies five communicative "superpowers" —high information density, demanding clarity, iterative questioning, synthesis, and strategic silence— that distinguish leaders who merely have good ideas from those who become central communication points in complex systems.

The author illustrates these skills through a personal account of a set of 2012 NATO conferences, where a tandem intervention disrupted a dysfunctional protocol and enabled genuine dialogue on complexity theory and its relationship to violence and peace. The reflection then deepens the analysis by introducing an emotional architecture that underlies all skillful mediation: a sevenfold sequence of curiosity, astonishment, courage, maturity (pride and humility as one), love, happiness, and worrylessness. Drawing on the author's **Complexity Matrix** (2020), the essay argues that visible communication skills are merely the surface of a much deeper structure — an emotional complexity pattern that, when properly cultivated, can reorganize dysfunctional systems and, in extreme cases, permit life to continue when the window for decision has narrowed to hours or minutes.

Written in 2026, as global conflicts escalate and decision windows contract further, this essay serves both as personal testimony and as a contribution to the emerging field of complexity governance. It is offered not as whistleblowing but as witness: the pattern exists, it can be learned, and it has already, more than once, permitted the miracle of continued life.

**Keywords:** communication, leadership, complexity theory, systems theory of violence, mediation, strategic silence, emotional architecture, NATO, peace studies, complexity governance

## Communication Skills

It has taken me years to understand why, at a critical point in my life, military and NATO structures selected me –an artist– as a peace mediator in war scenarios. I just read an article by Sarah Cordivano that made it clear. Surprises never come alone.

Cordivano writes:

> "I do not just mean they are good on stage or write polished emails. I am talking about something deeper. They take complex ideas and make them easy to understand. They ask sharp questions that cut through noise. They help a room full of other smart people get aligned on what matters and what happens next. These skills are not 'nice to have.' They are what turn a leader from someone who has good ideas into someone who becomes a central communication point in the system. When a leader can do that, they help everyone around them make better, faster and more confident decisions. ... A leader with strong communication skills becomes a subtle agent of change. Meetings are shorter. Decisions are clearer. People leave knowing what they are doing, how it fits into the big picture and why it matters."

She then offers a single, brilliant example:

> "His approach to meetings was clever: whoever organized the meeting was required to prepare a pre-read document. The standard for this was high: short, with foundational knowledge and the pros and cons of the decision at hand. Despite the name, no one actually reads the pre-read before the meeting. So he'd take the first ten minutes of every meeting for each person to review the document silently and add their comments. Then the rest of the meeting would be focused on discussing open questions and next steps. The brilliant thing was that by the end of the pre-read time, everyone was already on the same page. There was no wasted time trying to get everyone, with varying degrees of understanding, up to speed. Meetings that could easily have stretched to an hour ended in thirty minutes. At the end of every one, people understood the situation, the decision and the next steps."

A personal experience may help illustrate the deeper stakes of what Cordivano is describing.

In the years leading up to my mediation work, NATO would ask permission to circulate my documents on complexity science among member states months in advance of major meetings. These documents —on systems theory, on the relationship between trauma and violence, on the seven cornerstones of peace— would hit some nerve. When I finally entered the room, months later, I could hear that something had worked: the assistants, the delegates, the supporting staff were all speaking the same language. They were discussing complexity. They were prepared.

And then the protocol would begin.

Protocol, in these settings, is pure waste. It is boredom weaponized against understanding. Speakers read from sheets prepared weeks in advance. They do not respond to what has been said because they cannot hear what has been said — they are reading. A single actor cannot always stop this lethal protocol of boredom. A tandem sometimes can.

I witnessed this vividly when a secretary of defense began reading a statement that contained painfully childish, awkward jokes — jokes written into his script for the sole purpose of pleasing the NATO Secretary General, who was presiding over the session. Reading a joke from a sheet, unable to deliver it with life, for the sake of currying favor with the person in charge: I think anyone can imagine how embarrassing this is. The room of 400 people felt it.

But worse, the Secretary General failed in his duties. Instead of stopping the embarrassing performance and starting a proper debate among adults — instead of changing the way people were discussing — he simply called on the next speaker to read from their sheet. Nobody reacted to the cringey statements.

Except one person.

That person stopped the entire comedy by pointing, precisely, at what was happening: a session president allowing embarrassing comments directed at him, meant for him, to pass without interruption — comments that embarrassed everyone in the room. That first person named the dysfunction. That created an opening.

And then a second person used that opening to ask for attention and explain, freely and without notes, what the debate was actually about — drawing directly on the complexity theory documents that had been circulated months earlier. In the end, the audience understood why complexity is such a dangerous property of all life, and why managing complexity is not an abstract intellectual exercise but a condition for survival. These conversations led to progress. They shifted narratives toward peace. The follow-up consisted in eight hours of a very productive discussion in the session. Two people were required to stop a waste of time and bring the conversation to a profitable end.

## On Strategic Silence

Among the five superpowers Cordivano identifies, one stands apart in its subtlety and its power: strategic silence. She describes it this way:

> "Strategic silence is not passive. It is an active choice to create space. Many leaders feel pressure to fill every silence with their thoughts, guidance or solutions... The unintended effect is that you take up all the air in the room. You send a signal that the most important perspective is always yours... Strategic silence looks different. It means you ask a question and then give people time to think before they answer. You resist the urge to jump in as soon as there is a pause. When someone shares something difficult or unexpected, you do not rush to smooth it over. You allow a few seconds of quiet so that the weight of what they said can exist in the room."

I have sat in rooms where the weight of what was said could not be smoothed over — where to rush in with words would have been not merely ineffective but catastrophic. In those rooms, silence was not a technique. It was the only possible response to a situation in which all arguments had been exhausted, all performances stripped away, all options reduced to a single unbearable truth.

This silence was not empty. It was filled with a sequence — a pattern I have carried into every room where life hung in the balance. The sequence is this: curiosity, astonishment, courage, maturity (a mix of pride and humility), love, happiness, worrylessness. And it is grounded in art-practice, deeply entrenched in the psyche of the artwork.

I was curious about what the silence would reveal. I was astonished that we had arrived at this moment. I had the courage to remain present rather than flee into words. I held the maturity to know that my pride in my skills and my humility before the stakes were the same thing. I loved the people in that room — all of them, even those whose actions had brought us here. I felt happiness, not because the situation was good, but because being fully alive in a moment of truth is a form of happiness. And I was worryless: not because I had no fear, but because I had accepted that the outcome was no longer mine to control.

Strategic silence, in such moments, does something that words cannot. It allows reality to land. It forces everyone in the room to sit with what has actually been said, what has actually been threatened, what is actually at stake. It removes the escape hatch of immediate rebuttal, the comfort of predictable protocol, the illusion that talking can still save us when talking has already failed.

In my experience, the most dangerous moments are not those filled with shouting. They are those filled with empty words — words designed to fill space, to maintain the appearance of deliberation, to

avoid the weight of what everyone knows but no one will name. Strategic silence refuses that avoidance. It demands that the weight be felt. Silence lasted.

And sometimes, after the weight has been felt, something shifts. Not because of anything that was said, but because of what was **not** said — because the silence itself became a statement that no argument could counter. And the sequence I carried within that silence — curiosity, astonishment, courage, maturity, love, happiness, worrylessness — became a pattern that the room could feel, even if no one could name it.

I have used this silence in settings I cannot describe, at moments when the window for decision had narrowed to nothing. I can say this much: it worked. And the reason it worked is that silence, when animated by this emotional sequence, becomes a complexity pattern of its own—a pattern that communicates more than language can carry. It is the equivalent of a pause in a musical composition, which is what an artist knows not as a silence but as a room for resonance.

## Conclusion: The Complexity Pattern That Produces the Miracle of Life

What Cordivano's framework describes, without using the language of systems theory, is a set of interventions that alter the complexity dynamics of any human gathering. Every room full of people is a complex system: a web of relationships, traumas, hierarchies, and unspoken assumptions and projections that shape what can and cannot be said. Protocol is an attempt to control that complexity—to reduce it to predictable outputs. But protocol, in its rigidity, often becomes a trap. It prevents the system from self-correcting. It locks in patterns that lead, inevitably, toward violence.

The skills Cordivano identifies—high information density, demanding clarity, iterative questioning, synthesis, and strategic silence—are not merely communication techniques. They are **complexity governance tools**. They allow a mediator to read the pattern of the room, to sense where the system is blocking its own intelligence, and to intervene in ways that release the blockage.

But here is what Cordivano's framework, focused as it is on observable behavior, does not fully capture: the internal architecture that makes those behaviors possible. That architecture is emotional. As I have written elsewhere, in my **Complexity Matrix** (2020), "Any failure of complexity architecture is purely and simply emotional." The corollary is also true: any success of complexity architecture is purely and simply emotional—not in the sense of sentimentality, but in the sense of occupying the correct emotional positions in the correct sequence.

The sequence I have carried into every mediation is this: curiosity, astonishment, courage, maturity (pride and humility as one), love, happiness, worrylessness. It is not arbitrary. It is a system: each

emotion prepares the ground for the next. And each healthy emotion is perceived as the overcoming of its traumatic counterpart.

I use this structure in every making of every artwork I serve the general public. This is the basic spine of all my aesthetic DNA.

- **Curiosity** opens the door. It says: I do not yet know what is true, and I am willing to find out. Its traumatic counterpart would be: hypoempathy, apathy, misanthropy, agoraphobia, severe isolation and loneliness, depression, disillusion, frustration, hopelessness. How many people experience these negative feelings on a day-to-day basis?

- **Astonishment** follows. It says: the reality I am encountering is worthy of my full attention. Its traumatic counterpart would be: numbness, encapsulation, separateness.

- **Courage** rises. It says: I will stay present even when staying present is terrifying. Its traumatic counterpart would be: envy, stealing, robbing, spoiling, as great powers do towards colonies or regions rich in resources. This is a result of cowardice. And it is a specific type of cowardice: the fear of being oneself—independent, creative, inventive, joyful, a grown-up responsible person.

- **Maturity** arrives—the paradoxical blend of pride in what I can do and humility about what I cannot control. It says: I bring my full capacity, and I release the outcome. Its traumatic counterpart would be: greed, derived from the feeling of loss, or being a loser, a coward who is dependent on a stronger part, the one providing what I cannot achieve by myself because I am a coward. To cheat, to lie, to be a traitor and drive other people into a trap, and to abuse power to get people to do what I require on the long haul—as an elite member driving public policies towards an ever-enslaving public debt that drives all children of a nation directly and straightforwardly into slavery.

- **Love** becomes possible from that grounded place. Not sentimental love, but the clear-eyed love that wishes the system to heal itself, that holds no one as enemy, that seeks the flourishing of all. Its traumatic counterpart would be: fury, frustration, permanent disappointment, spoiling other people's days. This is exactly what the label of the US military intervention in Iran illustrates: "Operation Epic Fury." Such is the child of narratives in war: they embellish their own falsehood.

- **Happiness** emerges. Not pleasure, but the deep alignment of being exactly where you belong, doing exactly what you are here to do. And here I must be precise. Happiness, in my design, is not the childish joy of individual sensation. It is shared emotional joy—the experience of togetherness in feeling, the state that emerges when nervous systems align in mutual recognition and delight. Its traumatic counterpart is betrayal, jealousy, distrust. These are not merely unpleasant feelings. They are structures that prevent togetherness. Betrayal destroys the possibility of shared emotional joy because

it poisons the ground of trust. The children killed in the school in Iran are not just dead; their deaths murder the future of togetherness for everyone who loved them. The negotiators in Geneva who smiled while planning death have made happiness itself—real happiness, the shared kind—impossible for those they betrayed. Jealousy says: your joy threatens mine. Distrust says: your openness will be used against you. This is exactly what the war in Iran is about: the US holding negotiations in Geneva that were nothing but a deep and treacherous move, to then fully let loose its furious jealousy at a country that holds riches—a distressed, traumatized, weak and depressed US elite wanting for itself to ever increase the sensation (not the feeling) of power, so as to mitigate and hide its own inconsistency, fear and weakness. The British empire still walks the same path, driving the US as if it were a "brat," a "bad seed," a "hellion," an "ankle biter," an "enfant terrible"—terms that can be directly applied to representatives of British, US-American and European politics, as much as to the same kind of person in dictatorial regimes like Iran, Russia, North Korea or Myanmar. Nothing new or surprising under the horizon—and yet each generation must learn to name it again, or be consumed by it.

- And finally **worrylessness**: the freedom from outcomes that allows you to act with full presence, unclenched, unworried, alive. Its traumatic counterpart would be: lovesick, possessed, revengeful, murderous people—which is exactly what the US army consists of, with no difference from the Holy Guards in Iran. Murdering is what they all do relentlessly, as perfect and diligent representatives of the system of violence.

I have called these seven "emotions," but the word is misleading if it makes you think of private feelings. **Curiosity** is not something I have. It is something I do—a way of being open to what is not yet known, a door held outward. **Astonishment** is not a sensation. It is the act of not turning away from what is too much. **Courage** is not a feeling that overcomes fear. It is the choice to stay in relation when fleeing would be easier. Each of these is a **relational posture**, a way of configuring myself toward others and toward the world. Their traumatic counterparts are not different feelings. They are the collapse of relation into isolation—apathy as the refusal to be-with, envy as being-against, betrayal as pretending to be-with while actually being-against. The sequence is not a list of inner states. It is a **grammar of togetherness**. And when a room full of people begins to speak that grammar, even without knowing it, the pattern propagates and life continues.

This sequence is the pattern I brought to the NATO room in 2012. I faced square all the negative emotions in the room. The positive pattern is the pattern I carried through the first intervention—naming the dysfunction—and the pattern that animated the silence that followed. It is the pattern that allowed the second person—a US deputy secretary of defense—to step into the opening and explain complexity theory with a clarity that 400 people could finally understand. And it is the pattern I have carried into other rooms, in other years, that I cannot describe—rooms where the window for

decision narrowed to hours, then to minutes, and where the stakes were nothing less than the continued existence of life on earth.

When a room full of people encounters this pattern, something shifts. Not because they understand it intellectually—most never will. But because they feel it. And feeling it, they remember that they too are capable of curiosity, astonishment, courage, maturity, love, happiness, worrylessness. The pattern propagates. The system reorganizes. The lethal protocol dissolves, and in its place, for a brief moment, genuine human encounter becomes possible. And sometimes, when that happens, life continues.

That is the miracle. It is not magic. It is architecture. It is the application of a precise emotional sequence to a complex system that has forgotten how to feel.

The skills Cordivano describes are the visible part of the iceberg. The emotional sequence I have named is what lies beneath—the seven-tenths of the mass that determines where the whole thing drifts. May those who carry these skills also cultivate this sequence. Without it, they are merely competent. With it, they become capable of miracles.

I am writing this now because the window for decision has narrowed again—narrower than it was in 2012, narrower than it was in 2019. The conflicts escalating around us are not separate emergencies. They are expressions of the same underlying complexity crisis: a global system trapped in protocols that prevent it from self-correcting, hurtling toward violence because no one will break the pattern.

Cordivano's article is important because it names the skills that break the pattern. My experience confirms that they work—not just in corporate meetings, but in rooms where the future of life itself is at stake. And my further experience confirms that these skills, to be effective at the highest stakes, must be animated by a specific emotional sequence—a sequence that can be learned, practiced, and carried into any room, no matter how dark.

I offer this reflection not as a whistleblower, but as a witness: this pattern exists, it can be cultivated, and it has already, more than once, permitted the miracle to occur.

May those who need it now find it in time.

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